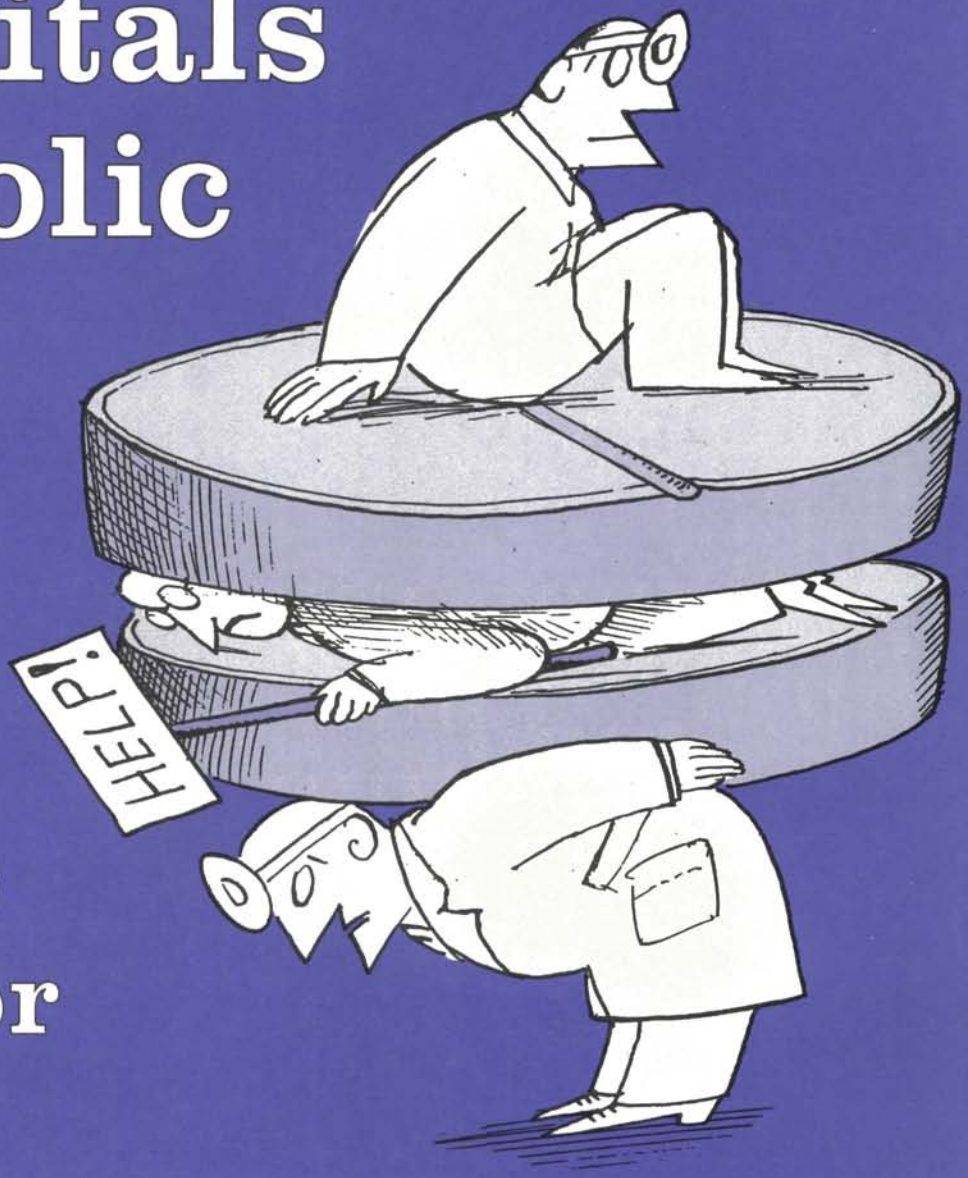
MANDELA
Don Wycliff

COMMONWEAL

A Review of Religion, Politics, and Culture February 25, 2000

Keeping Hospitals Catholic

Clarke Cochran



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Moreau Little Theatre

Information: 219-284-4636

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Kathleen Norris

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Mary C. Boys, SNJM

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Jeanette Rodriquez

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Diana L. Hayes

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Gail Mandell

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COMMONWEAL

February 25, 2000 / Volume CXXVII, Number 4

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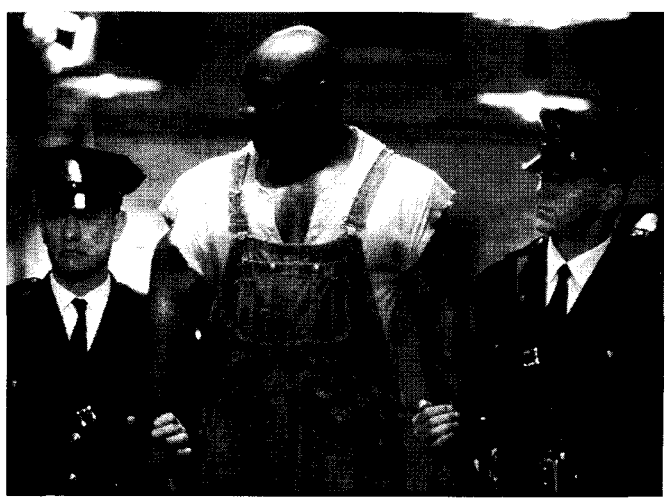

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Cathleen Medwick's life of TERESA of AVILA is

"A marvel of scholarship & wit"
—LIESL SCHILLINGER,
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"A perceptive, intelligent, lively biography

which should bring the robust spirituality and vibrant personality of this extraordinary woman the wider recognition she deserves."—KAREN ARMSTRONG, author of *A History of God*

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is the clarity with which a complicated spiritual life is articulated." —Laura Furman, author of *Ordinary Paradise*

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To the Editors

Weigel, Romero & the pope

Even critics of George Weigel's biography of Pope John Paul II acknowledge that the work is a major achievement, of which any author could be justly proud. My reference to the pope's "very muted reaction" to the assassination of Archbishop Romero [Correspondence, November 19, 1999] was a comment on one of the "blind spots" mentioned by your reviewer, Eamon Duffy: "Weigel's virtual silence about the pope's coolness toward figures like Oscar Romero...." Weigel [Correspondence, February 11, 2000] calls my characterization "a myth" because the pope sent the Salvadoran bishops' conference a telegram, published in *Osservatore Romano*, expressing his "deepest reprobation" of Romero's "sacrilegious assassination." The questions raised in my previous comment remain. Would the papal response have remained at this level had an archbishop been shot at the altar in Poland or elsewhere in Eastern Europe? Or was the cardinal (appointed by John Paul II) who told me that there was a double standard—one for Latin America, the other for Eastern Europe—closer to the mark? (REV.) JOHN JAY HUGHES
Saint Louis, Mo.

Still a rose

I concur with Margaret O'Brien Steinfels's review of the book *Under the Rose* [January 14, 2000], and her accurate description and recollection of the man, Henry J. Browne. "Harry" Browne was my mother's brother. It is unfortunate that the Feminist Press published this egotistical memoir. Confession by definition is the acknowledgment of one's own sins, not the sins of others. Harry was torn between the "married" life and his priestly duties, living with the guilt of breaking his sacred vow. He suffered the anguish of being torn between two families: his mother, sister, brother, and his children and their mother. Harry Browne was not without fault. But through his life as educator, historian, and political activist he did accomplish some good in this world. May we all be remembered for the good we do in this life, and may he rest in peace. CATHERINE HENIHAN
Brooklyn, N.Y.

False contractions

In his downplaying of the argument from design ["Theology after Darwin," January 28, 2000], John Haught misrepresents creation both as divine act and as created gift. First of all, the God of "humble self-sacrificing love" and "kenotic compassion," the God, in other words, of grace, is not the God of "faith's primordial experience"; that is reserved for the Creator of the universe, the God of nature, who is, so to speak, the God directly pertinent to the question at hand: *gratia praesupponit naturam*. By passing over this presupposition, Haught not only derails the argument from design with excessively existential talk, he misses the meaning of the act of creation itself. The divine act of Creation is not a "contracting" or "absenting," but a word of absolute affirmation that makes things be, bestowing upon them that being in virtue of which, as Saint Thomas argued, creatures image the Creator, and thereby, to the degree of their being, the divine agency and freedom.

Second, by presenting the argument from design only in caricatured terms (a "theology fixated on design," "frozen design") that restrict our view to what remains unfinished in creation, Haught loses sight of what is already so magnificently "finished," the "beauteous order of the universe" (Saint Thomas) that proclaims the glory of the divine artisan, an order that is not only the wellspring of poet-

(Continued on page 28)

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Fatal error

Notoriously, a substantial majority of Americans supports the death penalty. One indication of this sobering fact is that no presidential candidate from either major party is willing to express even tentative doubts about capital punishment, lest he be accused of being "soft on crime." At no time was this more apparent than during the 1992 presidential race between George Bush and Bill Clinton, when then-Governor Clinton made a point of interrupting his campaign for the White House to return to Arkansas to preside over the execution of a retarded man. Since 1977, when the Supreme Court permitted the reinstatement of the death penalty, few elected officials at any level have been willing to risk the wrath of the public by calling the gruesome practice into question.

Until now. Last month Illinois Governor George Ryan, a moderate Republican who in fact favors the death penalty, halted executions in his state. Ryan felt morally compelled to act when confronted with the astonishing number of Illinois death penalty convictions that have been overturned by subsequent judicial inquiries. Since 1977, thirteen death row inmates have had their convictions reversed. "I cannot support a system, which, in its administration, has proven so fraught with error and has come so close to the ultimate nightmare, the state's taking of innocent life," Ryan said. "Until I can be sure that everyone sentenced to death in Illinois is truly guilty, until I can be sure with moral certainty that no innocent man or woman is facing a lethal injection, no one will meet that fate."

Despite the overwhelming facts supporting his decision, Ryan's action still required political and moral courage, especially coming from someone whose party has made supporting the death penalty almost a sacred duty. (Texas Governor George W. Bush, still the leading candidate for the Republican presidential nomination, has presided over 119 executions.) But more important, Ryan's obviously principled stand points to the inherent problem with capital punishment even for those who think it is necessary and just: the egregiously flawed criminal justice system that determines who ends up on death row in the first place.

It would be good if Governor Ryan and others who support capital punishment in the abstract could be convinced that, as John Paul II has recently argued, the death penalty is not needed to protect society, and the state's willingness to take life undermines the sanctity of all life. Short of that unlikely reversal of opinion, however, it may still be possible to convince the American people and their elected officials that the "moral certainty" concerning guilt that Governor Ryan rightly demands is nearly impossible to attain in many cases. It is especially hard to attain given the feeble quality of legal representation poor and minority defendants are too often accorded, especially from court-appointed and poorly paid private lawyers.

One indication of how haphazard the defense work can be is that nine of the thirteen convictions overturned in Illinois benefited from the work of enterprising journalism students at Northwestern University. The students turned up exculpatory evidence the original lawyers could easily have discovered but because of incompetence or neglect did not. Moreover, the *Chicago Tribune* reports that 33 death row inmates—Illinois now has 161 people awaiting execution—had been represented by lawyers who have been either disbarred or suspended. The story is no prettier in

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On-line discussion group

Commonweal will be sponsoring an e-mail discussion group from now until July 1, 2000. The group will exchange messages dealing with articles and topics presented in the magazine. To join, simply send an e-mail message to *commonweal-subscribe@egroups.com*

Happy e-mailing!

states where the death penalty is even more enthusiastically embraced. In Florida, for example, twenty death row convictions have been reversed since 1977.

Principled proponents of the death penalty cannot ignore the fact that too many people now awaiting execution have been given inadequate—and sometimes criminally negligent—representation. Since 1973, eighty-five death sentences have been overturned nationwide, some only hours before the sentence was to be carried out. Even though persons accused of murder have had the right to legal representation since the Supreme Court's famous *Gideon* v. *Wainwright* decision in 1963, rights are translated into realities only when there is the political will to do so. Many states have highly professional public defenders available to the poor, but defendants do not always avail themselves of these services—that seems to have frequently been the case in Illinois. And even if there are public defenders, they may not be sufficiently skilled or properly funded. Texas has no public defenders at all; defendants must rely on court-appointed lawyers who are given few resources with which to mount a defense. Congress itself, as recently as 1996, eliminated funding for twenty Death Penalty Resource Centers, and state legislatures continue to pass measures to streamline the appeals process for those facing execution.

What is to be done? Outrage over wrongful convictions, including convictions orchestrated by police and prosecutors, has dramatically changed the nature of the death penalty debate in Illinois, and Ryan's moratorium has been widely applauded. Nationwide, the situation may also be ripe for rethinking. Death penalty opponents must remember, however, that the practice will only be abolished when a majority of Americans becomes convinced it is wrong or hopelessly flawed in practice. That change is most likely to come about in the political arena, rather than through the courts.

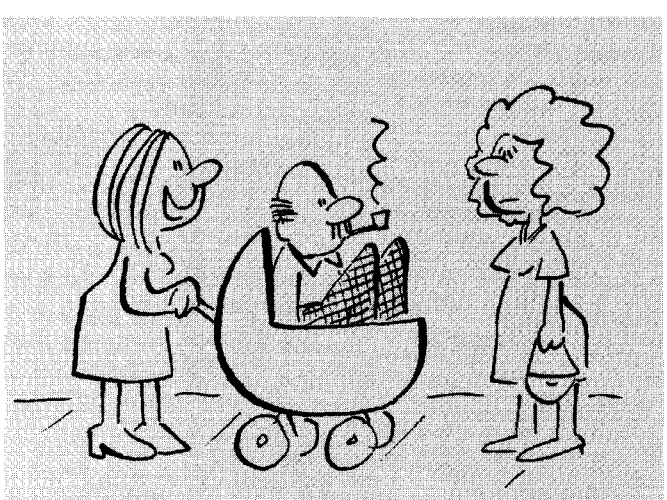
Despite the publicity the death penalty attracts, it is safe to assume that most Americans are not now fully aware of how chaotic and arbitrary the criminal justice system can be. Opponents should press the case put forth by Ryan, urging Americans to think again about what the death penalty entails in a criminal justice system chronically short of money, occasionally corrupt, and, like all human institutions, prone to error. With the continuing decrease in crime rates, this is a propitious time to ask Americans if the risk of putting an innocent person to death—3,625 people are now facing execution in the United States, according to the Death Penalty Information Center—is worth the satisfaction of "seeing justice done" on such an imperfect and unprecedented scale.

ET CETERA

Catholic intellectual found ■ Daria Donnelly, children's book reviewer extraordinaire, woman of many (bonnet-like) hats, scholarly accomplishments, and politely stated but strongly held opinions, has joined *Commonweal*'s editorial staff as associate editor. We are very pleased about this, and you should be too. Daria hails from Pittsburgh, where she learned the art of reasoned disputation growing up with six siblings. Schooled at a formative age by the Sisters of Mercy, she went on to confront secular humanism in all its hideous seductiveness at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. A Ph.D. in English literature followed from Brandeis, and then a term of teaching the same to students at Boston University. Somewhere along the trail of these picaresque adventures, she married Steve Weissburg, a (gasp!) patent attorney. Longtime readers (are there any other kind?) may remember Daria's first appearance in the magazine ("Into the City of Faithfulness," June 18, 1993), an article about the travails and joys of "negotiating a Jewish-Catholic marriage."

Daria and Steve, skilled negotiators apparently, are the doting parents of Leo, age five, who is, needless to say, an avid listener and reader of picture books, C.S. Lewis, fables, poetry, fairy tales, and much, much more. Leo is also, we can attest, an adept operator of the fax machine, which he uses on a daily basis to keep his mother apprised of what she is missing at home.

Not the least of Daria's contributions to *Commonweal* is that she has brought the average age of the editorial staff down to a nearly adolescent forty-five. In short, she promises to put an extra spring in our step and bring a fresh perspective to our deliberations. We are grateful she has consented to plunge into the fray here, and wish to assure Leo that Mom will be safely returned to him, at least most nights, in time for the story hour.



"He looks exactly like his father!"

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JO McGOWAN

UNCOMFORTABLE IN COMFORT

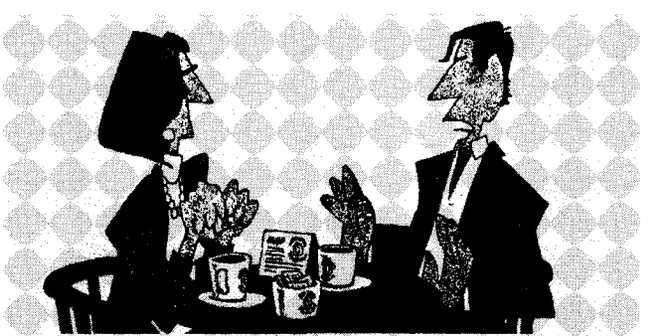
Being 'rich' in Dehra Doon

Nearly two years ago, my husband and I bought a small piece of land here in Dehra Doon, the town in India where we have lived for more than a decade. "By next Christmas," we told the children, "we will be in our own house." That Christmas came and went and another has just passed. We haven't even had a blueprint drawn, let alone dug a foundation, although we have moved to larger quarters. It is more than just our ability to procrastinate. There is something more fundamental at work which has to do with the nature of life in the place we stumbled into some ten years ago.

I was the one who chose Dehra Doon. It is a pretty area, once you get out of the congested inner city, and the climate is a milder version of what I grew up with in Massachusetts (it never snows). We can see the Himalayas from our terrace, our garden is large and full of flowers, the children can climb trees and ride their bikes, and we like all our neighbors. Both my husband and I run well-known and respected institutions and there is a genuine pleasure in being big fish in a very small pond. But when I consider the rest of my life rolling out here, for that is what building a house implies, I get nervous.

Uttar Pradesh (the state Dehra Doon is in) is one of the poorest, most backward states of India. Illiteracy is high, corruption is a way of life, and even the most basic of civic amenities are in working order only some of the time. Electricity supply is erratic, with power cuts of up to four hours a day the norm. Water comes only at specific times in the morning and evening, always at low pressure and not safe to drink. Roads are an obstacle course of gaping manholes and open drains; sidewalks do not exist. Traffic, if it weren't so dangerous, would be ludicrous. No one has the slightest idea that rules of the road exist: The object is simply to get oneself from point A to point B in the least possible time. Shops and offices open when they feel like it and people work when the mood strikes. It is not uncommon to go to the bank and find there is no cash available or to the post office and find there are no stamps.

So why are we here? Oddly enough, there are a lot of reasons. The first is the way our children are turning out. Although they complain about the sad state of affairs (they have been to the United States often enough to know that things can be different), they have flourished. They are resourceful, adaptable, resilient, and very easy to please. My sister came to visit recently and one of the gifts she brought for the children was spiral notebooks, three each. They were beside themselves with delight, thanking her again and again. She, accustomed to American children who have everything and are generally bored with most of it, was charmed. She was also charmed by our children's good manners and respect for elders and by the fact that they seem not to realize that teen-agers are supposed to be surly and uncommunicative. I know that nice adolescents exist in America too, but I also know it takes much more effort to navigate them through the shoals of that consumer culture.



"Look. Don't judge me by the clothes I wear, the car I drive, the books I read, the food I eat, the music I like, the friends I see, the money I earn, the place I live, the job I have, the things I say, or the way I act. OK?"

Another reason is my work. I run a school for children with mental handicaps, in spite of being a college dropout with no qualifications at all. I am just the administrator—I hire experts to work with the kids—but in the United States I wouldn't get past the receptionist's desk. Here, anything goes. There is a real sense of life's endless possibilities, and while I complain about the very lack of government regulation that allows quacks and charlatans to thrive, I know that I benefit from the same. I also know that if I weren't doing this work, it wouldn't be happening, at least not right here. The near total lack of services for children with mental handicaps in towns like Dehra Doon gives my small contribution a significance it would not otherwise have—it is impossible to overstate the pleasure I get as a result. I feel like a pioneer sometimes, with no limits to where I can go and what I can accomplish. Sometimes I can hardly sleep for the excitement.

And yet, and yet....Recently, I received my copy of *Commonweal Confronts the Century*, the wonderful selection of *Commonweal* essays of the past seventy-five years, and I was particularly disturbed by the very first one: "Terror in Vienna" by George Shuster. The essay is a chilling account of the descent into madness of that "quiet, dignified city" during the Nazi takeover, when Jews were hunted down in the streets and killed in cold blood. I believe it was the immediacy of Shuster's description, albeit sixty years later, that has put me into my present frame of mind.

For although the situation is very different politically, the same thing could happen here. There is an undercurrent of violence and desperation that permeates even the most ordinary situations in India, at least in the volatile North. One moves with instinctive caution in crowds. There is no telling what the spark will be.

Until fairly recently, howev-

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er, in spite of understanding how wide the gulf was between me and the poor, I somehow believed our family would be safe in the event of trouble. Not that I actually thought about it much. Our lives were so simple and pared down that it didn't occur to me very often to think about the differences that separated us from the poor. While sober analysis could persuade me that in the eyes of an angry revolutionary my life was not much different from a fat cat Republican's, on a day-to-day level I believed the difference was vast and this saved me from many sleepless nights of anxiety.

Now, however, I am forced by circumstances to be much clearer about my position here. In the past year, my husband and I have suddenly become wealthy. Not by American standards—our combined income is less than $9000 a year—but relative to our community here. We have moved to a large house, we have a formidable collection of household helpers, and I, anyway, have simply stopped thinking about money as an obstacle in my life. Where before I would shop as the poor do, buying only enough for the moment (one roll of toilet paper at a time, for example; although no poor person here would ever dream of buying toilet paper! My argument keeps breaking down!), now I behave as if I am in the United States where time itself is money and where wasting it by shopping every day when one trip would suffice for the week would be silly. I buy in bulk now and get annoyed, not stricken, when something runs out unexpectedly. I no longer keep up with the daily fluctuations of vegetable prices and couldn't say anymore how much a kilo of sugar costs.

This blasé attitude to the daily necessities has distanced me from the poor more than anything else I can think of, and it has changed everything in its wake. I think of myself differently now, as more worthy, somehow, more deserving of whatever it is I happen to want at the moment. Now that my house is more comfortable, I am less tolerant of being disturbed in it. Now that I have staff taking care of both my home and my office, I am more impatient when they slip up. Now that I have more gadgets and toys, I am more frustrated when there is no electricity to run them.

In America, where it is possible to live surrounded mainly by people who are making choices similar to one's own, where one can confidently expect that systems will function and the goods will be delivered, it is more difficult to see reality as it is for most of the world, and to judge ourselves and our role in the perpetuation of inequity. In India, there is no such luxury. My complicity and culpability stare me in the face every day. India tells the truth and I am not sure I want to hear it. □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

WILLIAM PFAFF

RIGHT TURN IN AUSTRIA

The Haider chronicles

The European Union's reaction to the Haider affair in Austria has expressed fine sentiments about democracy but offends the fundamental democratic principle that the popular will, expressed in an election, deserves respect. Great pressure was placed on Austria to block the government coalition between Joerg Haider's right-wing Austrian Freedom party and the mainstream conservative People's party. This was the only governing coalition on offer, the People's party and the Social Democrats having failed to agree to form a government. Moreover, it was the coalition the Austrian public had effectively voted for.

Haider's party won 26.91 percent of the vote in the last legislative election, marginally more than the vote given the mainstream conservatives, who for the past thirteen years governed the country in coalition with the Social Democrats. (The last-named led in October's election, with 33.11 percent of the total.) The clear intention of those who voted for the Freedom party was to prevent another People's-Social Democratic government. The two parties have ruled Austria since World War II, either in coalition or in what may be called collusion, with the country's institutions and posts of power shared proportionately between the ruling parties. That corrupting situation, born of electoral proportional representation, has for years tended to stifle clear-cut policy debate and a real choice in national direction. Haider is not a man any democrat is pleased to see as a major figure in Austrian politics, but the collaboration of the two established parties invited a populist reaction of just this kind.

Haider's policies bear the taint of xenophobia, and his speeches have regularly included ostensible slips of the tongue that bring to mind the Nazi rhetoric of the past. His conduct as president of the state of Carinthia, where he chose also to make himself minister of culture, has justified concern about his political methods and ambitions. He is a talented orator with demagogic skills. Serious people in Vienna consider him an unstable and dangerous man. However, his hostility to further European integration and his call for new limits on immigration are no more extreme than positions taken by mainstream political figures elsewhere in the European Union. There is, in fact, a European consensus today on the need for new common controls on immigration.

Haider has populist counterparts elsewhere in Europe and in the United States. There is no racist taint to Ross Perot or Patrick Buchanan's hostility to easy immigration to the United States, but the two represent a current of populist nationalism similar to that tapped by Haider in Austria, by Jean-Marie Le Pen in France, and by the Zurich businessman Christoph Blocher, whose nationalist and xenophobic party recently succeeded in Switzerland's national elections.

Fourteen of the fifteen European Union

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governments have done an obvious electoral service to Haider by imposing sanctions on Austria as punishment for the Freedom party's participation in a coalition government. This reinforced the sense of frustration with domestic political blockage, and the perception of international persecution, which caused many Austrians to vote for him.

One can sensibly argue that what Austrian voters need is a dose of reality. Let them try out a rightist coalition and see what happens. If human-rights abuses follow, despite the solemn assurances demanded by Austria's president, Thomas Klestil, and provided by the coalition parties, foreign sanctions would clearly be justified. They would be required by the obligations that link European Union members to one another.

But Austrian voters can reasonably complain that their sovereignty is abused when they are told that membership in the European Union limits how they can legitimately express their opinions and cast their votes—particularly when the main issues at stake are essentially domestic ones, concerning immigration and citizenship.

One might say that the United States is an old and secure democracy that can afford to take a complacent view of demagogues, of whom America has seen many, and to practice wide tolerance concerning the expression of political opinion. By contrast, the question now posed about Europe's political values is whether Europe's experience of nazism justifies international constraint on the political freedom of EU members, and restrictions on political debate on sensitive subjects. In that case, how is it decided what is and is not fit for expression?

The American choice has been that acts can be proscribed and punished, but the expression of opinion should be free, and the choices put before electorate without limit. Despite the flawed American record on civil liberties and the undeniably repressive force of conformist opinion in the United States, this is a principle that has proven itself. □

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Carlos Lozada

DEBT RELIEF

How poor is poor enough?

During Argentina's presidential campaign last fall, the trailing candidate, Eduardo Duhalde, floated an audacious trial balloon: He brazenly proposed that his country renegotiate its massive external debt, and even went so far as to request an audience with Pope John Paul II to discuss debt forgiveness for Argentina as part of the Jubilee 2000 movement.

The fallout was immediate and unmerciful. Latin American financial markets took a nosedive at the prospect of a debt moratorium, while local pundits seized upon the issue to argue that Duhalde would mismanage Argentina's newly privatized market economy. Despite copious retractions and clarifications, Duhalde fell further in the polls and eventually lost in a landslide. Rather than seek divinely inspired debt forgiveness, Argentina clearly opted to keep faith with its creditors.

Though his proposal was likely no more than a desperate blunder during a faltering campaign, Duhalde unwittingly hit upon a critical set of questions in the debt-relief debate. Which countries are—or should be—eligible for relief? How poor and indebted must a nation be to qualify? And perhaps most important, who sets the standard?

In 1996, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) created the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, the largest official debt-relief effort to date. The program's goal is not to eliminate poor countries' debts altogether, but simply to reduce the payment burden to "sustainable" levels, such that governments can continue servicing their debts, yet still finance antipoverty programs and social services.

Three main criteria for eligibility were established. First, the country in question must qualify for special World Bank loans targeted for extremely poor nations, usually with per-capita incomes of about $800 or less a year. Second, the nation must face an "unsustainable" debt (its total debt must exceed 200 to 250 percent of the country's annual export earnings, or its yearly debt payments must exceed 20 to 25 percent of export earnings). And finally, the government must show a three-to-six-year track record of implementing orthodox, IMF-approved macroeconomic reforms.

Although more than three dozen nations are technically considered HIPCs, through January 2000 only seven countries—Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guyana, Mali, Mozambique, and Uganda—had fulfilled these requirements and agreed to debt-reduction packages, qualifying for up to a combined $6.8 billion in relief over time. Five addition-

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al countries—Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Nicaragua, Mauritania, and Tanzania—have completed their preliminary reviews and may eventually qualify for relief.

The HIPC program has received mixed reviews from nongovernmental organizations. Opponents claim that governments must wait too long to obtain debt relief, and that this relief is not deep enough for countries to make meaningful inroads against poverty. Others chastise the multilateral agencies for requiring strict fiscal discipline as a precondition for debt relief, thus indirectly restricting government spending on social services.

Last June, the finance ministers from the G-7 countries (an association of the world's most advanced economies) supported calls for "deeper, broader, and faster debt relief through major changes to the HIPC framework." Their proposals included reducing the level of what is considered a "sustainable" debt load, thus offering more relief for qualifying countries, and revising the standard economic policies required for nations to obtain debt relief, with a greater focus on long-term measures that will reduce poverty and protect the environment. At their annual meetings in Washington, D.C., last September, the World Bank and IMF themselves introduced modifications to the HIPC initiative, both reducing the debt sustainability threshold and making debt forgiveness conditional on antipoverty programs in debtor countries.

These changes are important steps in the right direction, and will no doubt begin to improve the debt-relief program. Yet one question remains largely unasked: Rather than simply deepen the level of relief and modify the policy framework for existing HIPC nations, why not also broaden the program to encompass additional highly indebted countries?

Consider Peru. It owes some $30 billion to its foreign creditors, only slightly less than the combined debts of the seven qualified HIPCs. Peru's annual payments are equivalent to more than one-third of its export earnings—far surpassing the required threshold for debt forgiveness. And Peru has implemented painful market-oriented reforms to its economy for nearly a decade now—a vastly superior track record compared to those of most highly indebted poor countries. Peru would seem a prime candidate for debt relief. But there is a problem: Peru is too rich to qualify. In the World Bank's "Global Development Finance Report for 1998," Peru is classified as a severely indebted "middle-income" country, based on its annual per-capita income of about $2,100.

Unfortunately, per capita income is hardly a sophisticated yardstick with which to assess a country's poverty. In Peru, the richest 20 percent of households accumulate more than half the country's annual income, whereas the poorest 20 percent earn a scant 4.4 percent. In this context, per-capita (or average) income is virtually meaningless. The "average" Peruvian—a statistical myth—might earn more than $2,000 per year, but in reality 60 percent of Peru's rural households struggle under the poverty line. How poor is poor enough?

Peru is one of many developing countries where small elites control vast proportions of the wealth-producing assets. Indeed, Latin America as a whole shows the most skewed income patterns in the world, even worse than sub-Saharan Africa's. Five percent of the region's population amass one-quarter of the annual income. And Brazil—another severely indebted nation that is "too wealthy" for debt relief—has the most unequal income distribution in Latin America. The top 10 percent of Brazilian households account for nearly half the national income, while the bottom tenth of households earn a meager 0.8 percent. Close to a third of Brazilians live in poverty.

A typical argument against expanding eligibility to countries like Peru and Brazil is that they can still issue bonds in global financial markets and can therefore refinance their debt through traditional methods. But arguing that a highly indebted and poverty-stricken country should not receive relief simply because it can still take on even greater debt is a bit like refusing to help a drowning man because he has not yet hit the bottom of the ocean.

Ultimately, debt relief may be more a matter of politics than economics. Clearly, the funds for more comprehensive debt forgiveness are available. One need only recall the recent multibillion-dollar bailouts in Mexico and Asia to know that rich nations can quickly mobilize massive financing when their own short-term financial interests appear threatened. Despite much lofty rhetoric, significant debt-relief financing remains elusive. The G-7 was vague as to how its proposed enhancements to the HIPC program would be funded. In its original form, the HIPC debt-relief program cost approximately $12 billion (in present value), whereas the enhanced version could increase this amount to $27 billion. And the Clinton administration recently earmarked roughly $1 billion in bilateral relief for the world's poorest countries. But how meaningful are these sums when the countries of sub-Saharan Africa alone owe $176 billion to external creditors, or when Latin American and Caribbean nations owe more than $550 billion? Expanding relief eligibility would only aggravate funding shortfalls, and would require more than token gestures on the part of advanced economies.

One is tempted to conclude that a flawed debt-relief program is better than none at all. But this is not the case. In a joint statement, UNICEF and the relief agency Oxfam cautioned that the HIPC program's financing uncertainty "raises the prospect of a diversion of development assistance into HIPC debt reduction. Such an approach would be inequitable because it would deprive non-HIPC countries of desperately needed assistance...." It would be tragic if implementation of the HIPC initiative—even an upgraded version—somehow left the international community with the sense of a job well done, the feeling that it had discharged a once-in-a-millennium obligation to the world's poor. There is so much more to be done. And in this age of astounding prosperity, there is no excuse not to do it. □

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ANOTHER IDENTITY CRISIS

Catholic hospitals face hard choices

Clarke E. Cochran

Case One. James Michener reports a conversation in Spain some decades ago. He asks about public hospitals and discovers there are none. All hospitals are church-operated. The idea of public hospitals astounds his Spanish friend. "You mean the government taxes you for what the church gives us? Tell me, would sensible men trust politicians to run a hospital? The church you can trust." Of course, in many parts of the United States at that time, Catholic hospitals *did* serve as the primary health-care providers, offering free or low-cost medical care.

Times change. Catholic hospitals still supply significant services (about 15 percent of all community hospital beds), but at prices as high as—and in settings often indistinguishable from—their public and other private counterparts.

Case Two. In a 1995 statement on the "Rationale of Catholic Health Care," the bishops of New Jersey stress its sacramental character and centrality to the church's mission. They also call attention to "forces which imperil the identity and integrity" of the ministry, including "market forces that gauge the effectiveness of health-care delivery solely in terms of profitability."

Prophetic statements sometimes are ignored. In August 1999, *Modern Healthcare*, the health-care industry weekly, reported the departure of top executives from Catholic Healthcare West, the fifth largest Catholic hospital system, after an aggressive market-based expansion strategy brought losses of hundreds of millions of dollars.

Case Three. Imagine being admitted to a Catholic hospital for serious surgery; or imagine that you are taking your elderly mother to a Catholic nursing home. What might you see that reassures you, that quickens your spirit in the midst of anxiety? Crucifixes surely; statues of the Virgin or saints quite likely; a chapel. What you will not see are the women religious who formerly dominated the daily life of the institutions they founded and who incarnated its Catholic identity.

Now take away your sense of sight. What will you hear, taste, touch, or smell that identifies this hospital or nursing home as distinctively Catholic? Will the words spoken on admission differ from those in a secular institution? Will the employees handle your mother physically in any different way?

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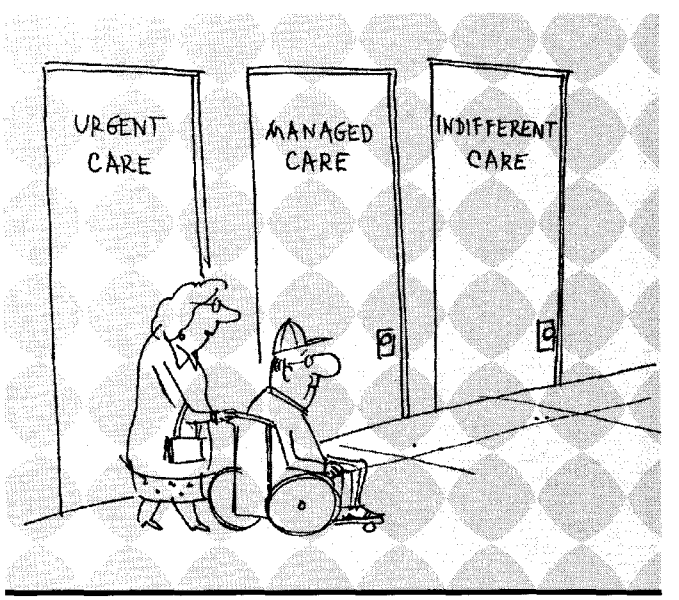
Arguably, the *sacramental* and *incarnational* aspects of Catholic life inform Catholicism's distinctive quality. Yet our imagined admission episodes above—and our actual daily experiences in Catholic health-care institutions—may lead us to wonder whether this quality persists in the corridors, patient rooms, admission offices, and surgery suites formerly suffused with Catholicity. We might ask: If the facilities are not clearly sacramental, might it not be time to transfer the resources invested in them to more distinctively Catholic healing missions?

None of this is news to Catholic health-care leaders, to bishops, to well-informed lay persons, or to patients. Catholic identity is as hot a topic in health care as in higher education, the arena where this issue is most prominently addressed in *Commonweal* and other journals of opinion. The health-care world parallels higher education in its debate over the 1990 apostolic constitution *Ex corde ecclesiae*, and the nation's bishops have been drawn into hospital identity questions as surely as college campus issues. Bishops in Saint Louis, Chicago, Austin, and other cities have wrestled with plans for mergers and affiliations between Catholic and non-Catholic institutions, and with controversies over contraception and sterilization services in newly created systems.

As with colleges and universities, local bishops seldom own the health-care institutions in their dioceses. Yet they are held accountable by Rome and in the public mind for these



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institutions' fidelity to the church's moral teachings and for the question of whether the values of the marketplace and the medical profession, rather than Catholic ideals, control the institutions. Just as Catholic colleges and universities opted for lay boards and administrators in the 1960s and 1970s, so, some years later, did the religious orders that had established and maintained Catholic health-care institutions relinquish their control. Just as colleges and universities abandoned doctrinal requirements and hired lay, often non-Catholic, faculty attuned to the principles and incentives of national academic disciplines, so too Catholic hospitals now hire lay and non-Catholic administrators whose professional ethos is the business culture that pervades their profession.

Catholic health-care leaders themselves are attuned to the problems these developments pose. In June 1999, the assembly of the Catholic Health Association (CHA), for example, featured panels on Catholic identity, "sponsor leadership," relationships between bishops and laity, and "sustaining identity in other-than-Catholic partnerships." While the assembly devoted attention to other topics—social justice, meeting the health needs of the poor, and national health-care reform—it is a sign of crisis when identity questions consume so much of an organization's energy.

Catholic health-care institutions have ridden out many storms over the last century and a half, and have proved unusually resilient. The reputation, medical quality, and financial picture of most remain solid. Yet there is pervasive anxiety in the hearts and minds of Catholic health-care leaders: They worry whether elegant principles can survive the heat of operating rooms, admitting offices, and nurses' stations; whether increasingly lay and non-Catholic executives and boards can adequately replace the women religious whose orders founded their organizations; whether institutions that serve largely non-Catholic patient populations and that increasingly rely on precarious Medicare and Medicaid funding can remain committed to a unique Catholic mission.

Defenders of Catholic health care argue that Catholic hospitals are a vital part of the medical system, providing the highest quality of care to patients, funding substantial charity care for the uninsured, and furnishing advocacy leadership for universal health-care coverage. Further, Catholic institutions keep vital principles before the public—the protection of life, commitment to social justice and the common good, service to the poor—principles all too likely to be lost in society's contradictory double quest for medical miracles and cost containment.

Moreover, real change is taking place in Catholic institutions. One example is Campaign 2000, the CHA's commitment to place health-care reform at the top of the agenda for the 2000 elections and to develop a national consensus during the next three years on accessible and affordable health care for all Americans. Catholic health-care institutions now have alliances with housing, youth and family, educa-

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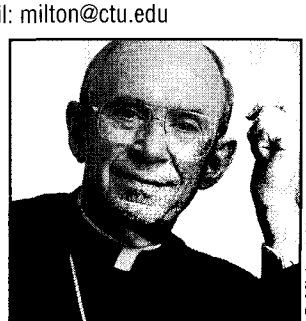

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tion, and anticrime initiatives, often in association with Catholic Charities agencies or with other Catholic and non-Catholic community organizations. They cooperate in campaigns against assisted-suicide initiatives, and they commit themselves to measurable goals for indigent care and assistance to local communities.

Yet these initiatives have their limits. First, the institutions undertaking them harbor all of the internal tensions in the church itself: divisions between liberal and conservative Catholics, the phenomenon of "cafeteria Catholicism," and the assumed irrelevance of the church's moral teachings to many self-identified Catholics. Additional internal tensions stem from friction over Catholic labor teachings and the response of Catholic institutions to labor organizing (*see* sidebar).

Second, the more committed Catholic health care is to delivering high-quality, advanced medical care, the more it must wrestle with medicine's technological ambitions—the illusion of life without suffering, the denial of death, the pipe dream of pharmacological or surgical solutions to aging, and the consequent spiraling rise in health-care costs. Modern medicine worships at the altar of research, development, and the market; Catholicism worships elsewhere.

Theologian Edward Schillebeeckx contended that the church is the "earthly representation of the sign of salvation in heaven." With Vatican II, the church rediscovered its own sacramentality: As Christ is the sacrament of God, so the church is the sacrament of Christ. Catholics, therefore, are a sacramental people and the Eucharist is the center of Catholic life. Signs and symbols—tangible, visible, and audible—tell Catholics who they are and identify the church to non-Catholics.

Principles like justice, freedom, respect for life, human dignity, and the common good are vital to Catholic faith. Nevertheless, they are both too abstract and too generic to form a distinctive Catholic identity, whether in health care,

'A Fair & Just Workplace'

On August 26, 1999, Bishop William S. Skylstad of Spokane, Washington, announced a working paper from the United States Catholic Conference's Subcommittee on Catholic Health Care and Work. Titled "A Fair and Just Workplace: Principles and Practices for Catholic Health Care," the paper aims to define "common ground" among Catholic social teaching on labor and work, the mission of Catholic health care, and efforts of labor to organize workers in Catholic institutions.

The character of the document reflects the heat of the debate and the delicacy of the process that produced it. The result of a nearly two-year discussion among representatives of the USCC, the Catholic Health Association, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the AFL-CIO, and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), it is not an official policy statement but a working paper intended to stimulate reflection.

The document reserves prominent attention for tactics to be avoided by both sides in an organizing effort; for example, false and misleading claims, threats and intimidation, misuse of supervisors' authority, and misrepresentation of Catholic social teaching to gain advantage. Such specificity reflects the last decade's troubled history of Catholic health care and organized labor.

Fundamental changes in organized labor and in American health care have converged in the last decade. Catholic networks came to dominate the list of the largest not-for-profit hospital systems. Unionization is one price that Catholic health care has had to pay for its successful response to market-driven health-system change. Despite wage increases for hospital workers in general, low salaries for many led to agitation for increased union membership. The SEIU doubled its health-care members between 1996 and 1999, adding 400,000 workers. Moreover, consolidations, reorganizations, and staff reductions in health care have produced anxiety, high levels of uncertainty, and deep frustration, even among highly paid employees. In California, angry charges and countercharges between union organizers and Catholic Healthcare West led to the appointment last October of a mediator to supervise negotiations.

Despite the aim of "A Fair and Just Workplace" to be evenhanded, it assigns greater obligations to Catholic health-care institutions than it does to unions. The document recognizes that its call for a spirit of collaboration is inherently in tension with the frictions that create the climate for union efforts. Moreover, unions are not Catholic organizations: They are under no obligation to follow distinctive principles of Catholic social teaching. The working paper, however, recognizes the "special responsibility" of Catholic health-care leaders to be more open and less confrontational when unions try to organize, and it summons the world of Catholic health care to live up to its sacramental calling.

C.E.C.

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education, or parish life. They must "find flesh," become incarnate, in words, gestures, and ambiance. A case in point: Because breakfast is often the only meal cancer patients enjoy, Calvary Hospital in the Bronx, New York, goes to great lengths to insure that patients do so. Each floor of the hospice has its own kitchen, where breakfast is prepared. Residents can smell the aromas of sizzling bacon and fresh-brewed coffee from down the hall before they ever see their meal. This sensitivity to patients' needs expresses something distinctive, admirable, and generous about the Catholic way of doing things. Unless such a sense is palpable and routinely noticeable in Catholic health-care institutions, the institutions fail the "identity challenge" of what makes them distinctly Catholic, even when they meet their medical and economic challenges successfully.

Given these challenges, what should those charged with maintaining and broadening Catholic health care in the new century do to ensure its Catholic quality and character? Here is a brief set of recommendations.

- *First*, internal reform of the Catholic hospital should move it away from strict adherence to the culture of medical technology. This is not to deny that millions of persons benefit from the advances of medical science. But medicine itself, as the Institute of Medicine reported last year, can be pathological as well as curative. Thus, Catholic hospitals in particular should practice a studious skepticism about technological "progress" in contemporary medicine, and should make it clear that they exist to care for the whole person, not to propagate the latest "medical breakthrough."

In the last decade, birth care in hospitals has become more family-centered and less "medical." Catholic hospitals should devote substantial resources to developing similar types of care that underscore the Catholic understanding of life and death, not only for patients but for their families. For example, in the future hospitals should restructure intensive-care units to allow families more access to their loved ones. Stories about Catholic facilities indistinguishable from their secular counterparts, though, are all too common. With trends that include shorter hospital stays and the fragmentation of care between ever more specialized personnel, the task of incarnating Christ's healing becomes more urgent.

- *Second*, technological progress carries unintended consequences. Seat belts, air bags, and level-one trauma centers have all saved lives. Still, they have left many people chronically disabled and their families ill-equipped to cope, financially, psychologically, and spiritually. As Catholic hospitals have established or affiliated with rehabilitation centers, it is not at all clear that they have successfully integrated pastoral care or sacramental environments as part of their therapy regimes.

Similarly, surgical and pharmacological progress has preserved not only severely damaged infants but also thousands

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of disabled and demented elderly persons. The traditional (though only decades-old) nursing home has become the residence for many, a place nonetheless shunned (even when well-run) by many potential residents. In past centuries, Catholics were organizationally inventive enough to create religious communities like the Little Sisters of the Poor or the Hawthorne Dominicans that met new needs. Is it too much, too idealistic, to expect similar creativity today? It may be a stretch to expect creation of new religious institutes dedicated to a sacramental presence in rehabilitation, care for the mentally and physically disabled, and care for the elderly. Yet other forms of institutional creativity are both required and more realistic.

For example, Medicare and Medicaid reimburse only for home-care visits that deliver a medical service—yet often the patient's real need is for conversation, help with housework, or support for family caregivers. These services are sacramental in character, not strictly medical. Because they cannot be reimbursed, the agencies are reluctant to have nurses and aides provide them. Suppose, however, that a Catholic home-care agency were always to send a team on its visits, where one person is the medical caregiver and the others are volunteers recruited from local parishes. Suppose Catholic hospitals, nursing homes, and other institutions were to unite to ensure the financing and training necessary so that every parish could establish a parish nurse program? Parish nurses already work with health-care institutions, parish staffs, and parishioners, not only to meet physical health needs but to integrate spiritual, emotional, and sacramental healing. This model could be expanded.

- *Third*, the new American culture paradoxically blends a "winner-take-all" economy, the Reagan-Clinton model of what John Paul II calls "superdevelopment," with pockets of intense poverty. Each produces new casualties, who find themselves (voluntarily or not) in medical or quasimedical settings—addiction treatment centers, mental-health facilities, shelters for victims of family abuse, and counseling programs. Clearly, the church must challenge the economic conditions that help produce such injuries, while simultaneously creating health-care institutions that recognize the spiritual dimension of these ills and the sacramental dimension of genuine healing of mind and spirit. The working poor and recent immigrants go without health insurance and are denied basic human rights to health care. Specialized clinics, operated by the church in locales where such devastation occurs, would appropriate institutional responses to new challenges. Washington, D.C.'s Christ House, Columbia Road Health Services, and Jubilee Housing, all inspired by the nondenominational Church of The Saviour, might serve as models.
- *Fourth*, given these developments, the hospital is no longer the central location of sacramentally oriented Catholic health care. But, the Catholic hospital is not an anachronism. It still provides critical and necessary medical care. In addition, Catholic hospitals are often the best sources of the financial capital and medical legitimacy required by new institutional forms.

Nevertheless, as indicated above, it may be time for the church to move more rapidly toward new types of institutions. If a hospital is Catholic only in name, residual history, or refusal to perform certain procedures, it may be time to sell it to the highest bidder and put the resources to better use elsewhere, meeting new needs with an institutional identity that is distinctively Catholic. If a Catholic nursing home, for example, is not actively seeking partnerships with local parishes to foster the development of new structures of sacramental care, it needs to rethink its reason for existence as a Catholic institution.

None of these recommendations should be interpreted as a call for Catholics to abandon hospitals or public-policy advocacy. On the contrary, Catholic health-care institutions and Catholic leadership in public policy are central in addressing social and policy needs. Yet, even if universal health insurance were enacted, Catholic institutions would have to serve millions of persons who would still fall between the cracks. And Catholic health care would still face a crisis of identity. The nation and the church will be ill served if Catholic hospitals and clinics survive merely as Catholic shells surrounding essentially secular medical institutions.

Sacraments are meeting places where we limited human beings taste unlimited love. They are signs of hope and sustenance, catalysts for growth and resolve. If Catholic health care has any purpose in the new millennium, it will be as the bearer of such a sacramental identity, of such a hope. □

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HOW TO HEAL MANAGED CARE

Health care is not a business

James L. Connor

All of a sudden, the managed health-care system in the United States finds itself at roughly the same level of popularity as tobacco companies, gun manufacturers, and asbestos makers. As icons of the near-universal loathing of Health Maintenance Organizations, managed-care executives are the new bad guys in television dramas and movies like *As Good as It Gets*.

There are surely some venal people in managed care, as there are in all sectors of society, including organized religion. What the HMO horror shows usually overlook, however, is that these executives are operating in one of the more excruciating moral mazes of contemporary American business. As a priest and ethicist who reaches out to business leaders, I have come to know a fair number of them. As a whole, they're very decent people who want to do the right thing. But they work in a corporate culture that often transcends, and trumps, their deepest values.

The bane of health care today is the illusion that it's a business like any other. According to this fallacy, delivering health care is like making widgets or Nike sneakers. Most people, of course, don't think so. That's because the encounter between patient and provider is not simply an economic transaction. It's a human interaction, a relationship of care. It strikes at the very essence of human well-being. My friends in managed care understand this, on some deep level. But they also understand the game they're in, and must play by its rules. In business, that means competition and the drive toward market share and profits or revenue (pressures applying to nonprofit as well as for-profit systems in today's health-care environment).

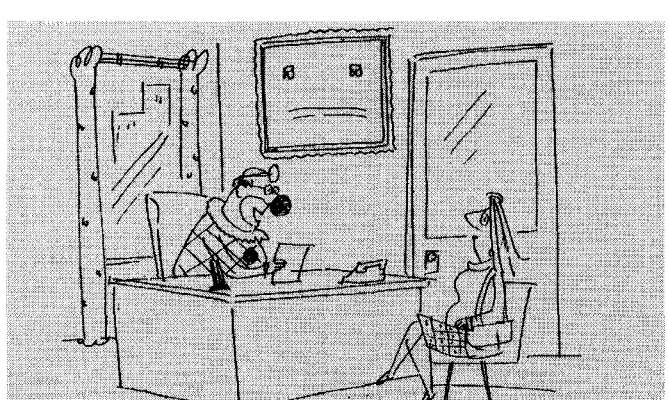
The paradox is that by playing this game so exceedingly well, HMOs are losing it. Congress is wielding a bipartisan hammer of legislation, physicians are unionizing, and the specter of costly malpractice lawsuits is haunting managed care organizations.

What managed care could use is a careful dose of moral perspective, for its own survival as well as for the greater good. My general prescription is a strong institutional sense that the business of health care is not business; it's care of health. Decision makers in the system need to begin cultivating the habit of ethical deliberation; and for that, they need a corporate climate that encourages discussion of their dilemmas. HMO horror stories aside, these are indeed moral dilemmas. The cases that come before these people are usually resistant to easy moralizing.

How does one deliberate over decisions that can so rapidly descend into HMO hell? One key is to focus on the "how" of decision making, not just the "what" or results. The public has tended to dwell on yes-or-no decisions in contested cases of managed care, involving medical procedures such as autologous bone marrow transplants for women with advanced breast cancer and lung volume reduction surgery for patients with advanced chronic pulmonary disease. But all of us, especially health-care providers, should give greater ethical import to the value-laden process of arriving at those decisions.

Let's examine a composite case: Eight-year-old Jason Martin has a deadly brain tumor and one last hope—a new cancer-fighting drug being tested several hundred miles away. The Martins, a family of modest means, have health insurance through a managed-care organization. But the regional treatment center is outside the network of providers, and the organization has refused to cover the costly, experimental drug therapy. With Jason's story hitting the press, an appeal by the parents has landed on the desk of Dr. Stanley, a medical director with a solid commitment to delivering high-quality, appropriate care. What should he do?

The account—though fictional—is of the kind that has turned public wrath on the HMO industry. At the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University in Washington, we brought together fifty-four health-care practitioners, industry leaders, and policy experts who grappled with



"Laughter is the best medicine, but it's not covered under your HMO!"

James L. Connor, S.J., *is director of the Woodstock Theological Center at Georgetown University. The center sponsors an ongoing seminar in business ethics.*

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scenarios like this one. Over the past two years, they have met periodically for seminar-style meetings to check the ethical pulse of managed care.

The moral drama of Jason Martin's case lies in the medical director's methodical mulling of questions that spotlight often-colliding values and priorities. For example, Dr. Stanley's managed-care organization has a policy of not covering treatment that is experimental or outside the network of providers. Would granting an exception in Jason's case create a harmful precedent? Would more patients insist on exotic and unproven procedures, possibly escalating the costs of employee health plans? Would employers pass on the charges to their workers, or trim health benefits to hold down costs?

The organization's oncologists have begun testing the same cancer-fighting drug, though less promisingly than at the regional center. Would a choice to send the family outside the network betray a lack of confidence in Dr. Stanley's own staff?

Furthermore, have Jason's parents really weighed the slender chance of success, against the burden of further treatment and the hardship of separation during what might be their son's final days? The regional center is four hundred miles away, and Jason's father would have to stay behind at his job.

During seminar meetings, participants acted the parts of these and other "stakeholders." In the end, Dr. Stanley decides to cover the experimental treatment—but only within the network. He also decides to tap the regional center's physician as a consultant. (The panelist who role-played the good doctor is, in fact, a medical director of a large managed-care organization.) "It came down to a gut feeling, based on the limited evidence he had, that Jason might have a chance to get an additional twenty-four months of life with the new therapy," the panel said in its report *Ethical Issues in Managed Health Care Organizations* (Georgetown University Press).

Did Dr. Stanley make the right choice? I don't know; I suspect there wasn't a single "right choice" in this case. What I find more revealing is the process of ethical decision making that yielded this result. Essentially, what the medical director did was probe the legitimate claims—and values—of the various so-called stakeholders and weigh them in light of the publicly available mission statement of the HMO. Stakeholders include patients and their families, physicians, employers who sponsor health plans, and, in the case of for-profit systems, shareholders. If managed care wants to rekindle the trust of all stakeholders and the larger public, such a process needs to become the norm, not the exception.

Obviously, HMOs won't foster this habit of ethical deliberation so long as they cling to the illusion that health care is just a business, trading in a precious commodity. All health-care leaders and practitioners must think of themselves as pursuing not just a career but a calling—a "profession" in the venerable sense of the word. Institutionally, managed-care organizations can drive home the message and steer the case-by-case deliberations with functional mission statements. These statements must say plainly that the goal of health care is caring for health. Everything else, including shareholder return and executive compensation, should be understood as practical means toward the delivery of quality health care rather than as ends themselves.

Within such an explicit ethical framework, managed care must also build a corporate culture of transparency. This could conceivably take the public form of annual "ethical audits" ranking the values and priorities that drive decision making and, within limits of confidentiality, disclosing how tough cases were resolved. Openness and transparency can be the salvation of managed care at a time when the system seems hell-bound in the public's judgment.

Amid the groundswell of demand for a "Patients' Bill of Rights," we should also remember that patients have responsibilities, too. They have an obligation to understand that medical resources are finite, and that exotic treatment often has diminishing returns, especially in the final months of life. Ultimately, patients need to factor death into the human equation.

Organized religion has a distinct role in helping all of us, especially the desperately ill, come to terms with suffering and death. Death does not have the last word in the unbounded book of life. Though there may be fictional strands in the recent stories of HMO horror, these tales reveal an institution in crisis. It is a crisis of moral legitimacy. The ethical fortunes of this ailing system may well depend on how many real-life Dr. Stanleys are out there in the brave new world of managed care. □

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Richard Alleva

BUNGLED EXECUTION

'The Green Mile'

The Green Mile does for capital punishment what *Life Is Beautiful* did for the Holocaust: It takes a monumental, harrowing subject, crying out for the utmost tact and moral inquisitiveness, and uses it as grist for the mill of pop entertainment.

Let it be said that *The Green Mile* is better than *Life Is Beautiful*. Roberto Benigni couldn't give us a plausible Italian town for the first half of his movie or a believably horrifying concentration camp for its conclusion, but director-writer Frank Darabont has no such problems with setting or atmosphere. The death row he's fabricated is credible, being grim but not operatically doomy. The guards behave as good men always do when they have worked too long and too closely together: they're aware of one another's annoying tics and habits but have grown past the point (well, almost) of being aggrieved by them (though the one guard capable of cruelty has earned the hatred of guards and convicts alike). The Depression-era South that lies outside the prison is also captured with sufficient verisimilitude. So much of the story (based on a novel by Stephen King) is fantastic that, to be tenable, it needed to be anchored in an initial realism, and this Darabont has achieved.

The events inside this setting—the arrival on death row of the scarily huge but utterly saintly condemned man, John Coffy, and the healing miracles he performs; the troubles set off by the vicious guard Percy and an even more vicious prisoner nicknamed "Wild Bill"; the changes brought into the guards' lives when they come to believe in Coffy's innocence without knowing how to save him—slide in and out of the realm of the supernatural, but Darabont possesses the requisite cinematic skills to keep us believing in what we see, at least at the moment of seeing it. His writing stumbles into purple patches (a distinctly nonliterary prisoner suddenly murmurs of his young wife being "bare-breasted in the firelight") but, on the whole, a satisfying terseness and an unobtrusive local flavor inform the dialogue. The visuals have purple patches, too (the wicked guard seen from above at the bottom of a spiral walkway as if he were already in the pit of hell), but mainly the camera nestles close to the guards and cons as they converse, josh, and bicker, and the big close-ups make us the intimates of these men as well as their audience. The editing keeps the action at a nice, ambling pace until it must slam us with some violence, and then slam us it does.

First among equals in the fine cast is Tom Hanks as Paul, the head guard, but I'm not sure I have any adjectives left with which to praise Hanks. In the past decade he's done the best character work since the heyday of Alec Guinness and Peter Sellers, but, unlike them, Hanks works without much make-up. Here, he's gained some weight and adopted an accent but, otherwise, it is what's going on behind his eyes that creates an entirely new character, distinct from anything he's done before. As "Brutal," a guard who's anything but, David Morse has virile dignity to spare. Sam Rockwell's "Wild Bill" is scary and funny, sometimes simultaneously. Tricky staging makes the 6'5" Michael Clarke Duncan look seven feet tall, but it is Duncan's inherent dignity and ground-swelling voice that make his portrait of John Coffy mountainous.

Why then is this skillfully crafted movie meretricious?

It seeks to persuade us of two things: (a) capital punishment is wrong; and (b) contact with a saintly personality can uplift one's life forever. Worthy ideas, but look at Darabont's methods of persuasion.

Capital punishment. We see three electric-chair executions, the second especially horrible because it's carried out improperly, but all of them unnerving. What's the point of this? That *electrocution* is horrible? Then why can't a pro-capital-punishment advocate simply indicate painless execution as a solution?

We learn that one condemned man is innocent. But what's the point of that? That the law should be more efficient in detecting perpetrators? Of course, in a system without the death penalty an innocent man would go on living and per-

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Laundry

1. The Laundromat, Sunday Morning

Nothing here is new except the autumn light washing through
the apple juice a mother pours out for her mismatched children.
Nothing is really clean; sheets are stained gray with weariness
but let themselves be folded, ready for our bodies' misery
and dirt once more, like generous innkeepers who never ask.
The thick proprietor, keys rattling like Saint Peter,
doles out tokens so our clothes can slam against scratched glass,
streaming soap and bleach, whirling like uncleansed souls who hope
their memories if not their sins will fade into an equal gray.

2. Cleanliness and Godliness

When the peasant girl, who did not know she'd one day be
Saint Bertilla, joined the Antwerp convent, she was sent
into the laundry. While the Kaiser's bombs made filthy work
for everyone, she boiled the quarantined pajamas stripped
from fevered, suppurating children. She blessed the holy
stink of bleach for cleaning linen and her hands, stripping them
of blood and urine, the slow leaks of bodies giving up
the ghost and flesh together.
When she was made a Saint,
the crowd was filled with men and women she'd scrubbed
in that contagious ward. As the Pope sang "Sancta," they fingered
their clean collars and smelled the furious prayer of bleach.

Deborah S. Burnham

haps achieve exoneration, but suppose capital punishment were reserved for people actually seen committing murder by hundreds of eyewitnesses and video cameras? Would the irrefutability of guilt render capital punishment just? By using only shock and sentiment to turn us against the death sentence, Darabont is avoiding any radical criticism of our laws. (Contrast this with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in which H.B. Stowe also used sentiment and shock but didn't neglect to aver the humanity of black slaves, thereby radically attacking a proslavery tenet, that blacks are subhuman.)

The closest this movie comes to radical criticism is in accenting the decency of the guards. This makes us ask ourselves why these good-hearted men should be made accomplices in the machinery of death. Yet the film finally flubs this point, too. We don't note any real deterioration in the characters of the guards as they kill guilty men, no matter how reformed these prisoners seem by the time of their executions. Paul regards his death row as the "intensive care unit of a hospital," and thus manages to maintain his poise and sanity. Only when a definitely innocent man goes to the chair do Paul and Brutal renounce their posts. Again, what is the point of this? That only misapplied capital punishment can shake the sensibilities of good men?

Now for the second theme. The figure of John Coffy is, with or without his initials, an obvious effort to present a Christ-like figure: Love, forgiveness, good counsel, and miracles flow out of him and onto all good people near him before he finds his crucifixion in the electric chair. But, *nota bene*, his blessings flow only in the direction of those who are already virtuous. To the vicious Percy and execrable "Wild Bill," this Christ figure does not say, "Go, and sin no more." (Nor are they portrayed as capable of redemption, since they're one-dimensional monsters.) In fact, John Coffy becomes the instrument of their earthly punishment. Having sucked all the negative force out of the warden's wife while curing her of brain cancer, Coffy then pours the evil force-field (or whatever the heck it is) into the mouth of Percy, who becomes a zombie long enough to shoot "Wild Bill" to death. Percy then regurgitates whatever Coffy spewed into him but, remaining brain-benumbed, is confined to an asylum. John Coffy later tells Paul that he had to do all this because "Wild Bill" was the real perpetrator of the crime of which Coffy was accused, and that evil people just have to be stopped. But "Wild Bill" was a condemned man. Wouldn't the electric chair have stopped him?

In fact, John Coffy finally comes across less as a Christ figure than as a white liberal's fantasy of an ideal black man: someone who not only suffers the errors of the white man but suffers *for* the white man, redeeming his oppressors with his taciturn beatitude.

Note also that however nobly most of the guards behave most of the time, Darabont keeps contriving situations in which Paul and Brutal can slam the two villains around, and these batterings are staged not as the understandable lapses of hard-pressed men but as the fulfillment of their moral rectitude. Now, at a Bruce Willis movie, I'm perfectly willing to clap and stomp my approval as our hero mows down thousands of terrorists, but Bruce Willis movies are honestly amoral schlock. The fits of condoned brutality in *The Green Mile* are made distasteful by the film's air of sanctimony.

Frank Darabont proved himself a first-class entertainer with *The Shawshank Redemption*, which I found simple, strong, and good. *The Green Mile* is twisted and powerfully lousy. In fact it's an artistic oxymoron: an anti-capital-punishment movie with a vigilante sensibility. □

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Celia Wren

A CURE FOR MILDEW

'The Donkey Show'

Shakespeare's disco roots? The hidden connection between Schopenhauer and mildew? Let me explain.

Over the past few months, I have managed to acquire a compendium of the disco era's greatest hits, a five-CD retrospective of '80s pop tunes, one seminal Madonna album, and Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, a release that erupted like Vesuvius over my early high school years. Now please do not assume, on reading this confession, that I like any of this stuff. Absolutely not. I am a classical music person, a Puccini junkie, a lover of pre-Bach and post-Beethoven harmonies. When I'm feeling lowbrow, I indulge in rock music of a dignified, rough-diamond cut—say, Eric Clapton.

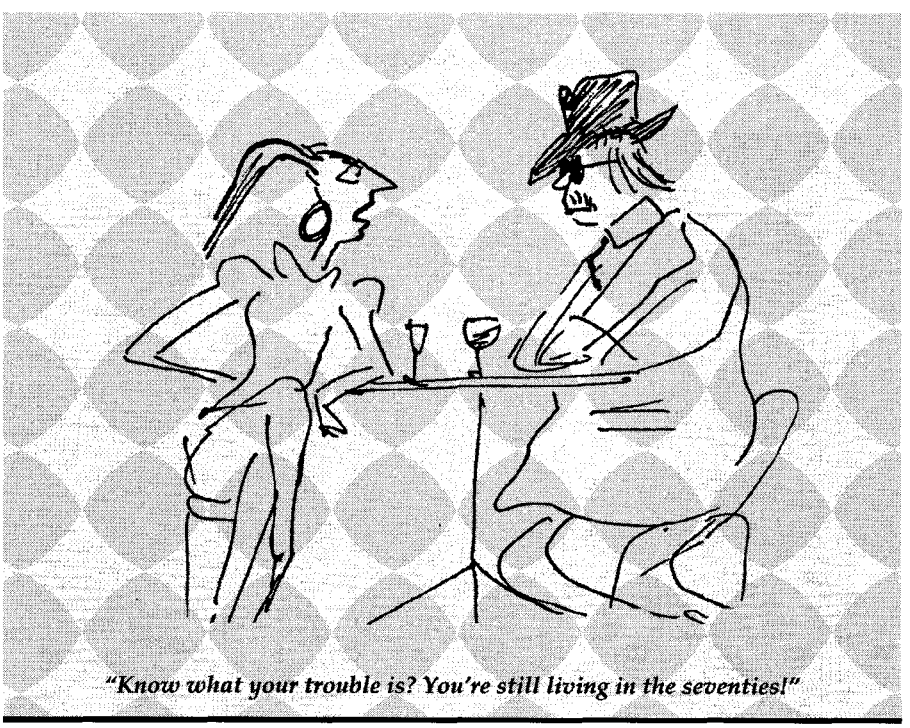
So if I hoard airbrained pop tunes, it is for purely practical reasons. The fact is, when I am feeling depressed or lethargic, a bar or two of hyperpeppy music jolts through me like an electric current, provoking me to turn on my computer, or pick up a mop, or buckle down to any number of long procrastinated tasks. Many a piece of prose, and many a mildew-free shower tile, is due entirely to the *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack, turned down low so the neighbors can't hear. The motivating power of synthesizer chords and overactive drum beats is so reliable, in fact, that I have come to rate pop-music costs as business expenses, just as necessary as the outlay for an ergonomic keyboard.

Now, most of the planet's inhabitants plow through their work without the aid of Madonna's "Material Girl" or the Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive," so there is obviously something idiosyncratic in my hit-tune dependency. Still, my guilty habit does point to a broader, more interesting phenomenon: namely, the peculiarly visceral impact that music can have on us. Whether or not it is true, as some thinkers have speculated, that the rhythms of our bodies (breathing, heartbeat) make us particularly susceptible to meter and tempo, it is certain that listening to music can be like mainlining emotion. It is for this reason that filmmakers insinuate tunes into the fabric of movies, manipulating our feelings in a way that theater directors have, increasingly, begun to emulate. (For a reminder of how greatly soundtracks sway our cinematic response, watch a very early suspense movie and notice how curiously flat key scenes can be without disquieting music to tense them up.)

But even when music isn't prodding our mood in one direction or another, it tempers the quality of the moment, making even banal experience seem more significant. Schopenhauer, who worked this truth into his abstruse theory of the Will, observed that "suitable music played to any event or surrounding seems to disclose to us its most secret meaning, and appears as the most accurate commentary upon it." This property is immensely reassuring in a world that can seem too confused or tedious or futile to have any meaning at all—think of those minutes spent waiting for a bus, or trying to change the ink cartridge on a fax machine, or scrubbing away at that mildew that will resume its conquest of the tile the moment you walk away.

In his lucid primer *Music and the Mind*, Anthony Storr gives Schopenhauer's point a slightly different emphasis, observing that music makes us feel as if we are living more intensely. Life is short—you can feel it slipping away while you scrabble at the fax machine's innards, ink cartridge in hand. But if "Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini" is lilting through the room, the minutes no longer feel wasted; a shallow experience acquires a little more depth.

Radio stations capitalize on this fact when they marshal up a type of programming in which I particularly delight—the so-called "Countdown" of greatest hits. Whether it is the race to the "New World Symphony," on a classical frequency, or the inexorable advance through rock favorites toward Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven"—Top Bands of the Millennium, Top Conductors of All Time, you name it, I am a pushover for the entire category.



"Know what your trouble is? You're still living in the seventies!"

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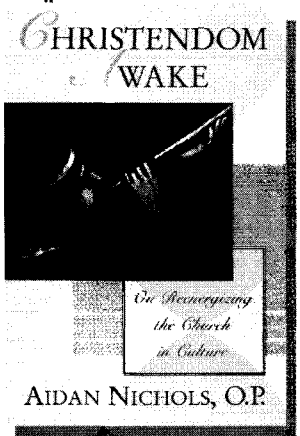
(Last Labor Day, when I was particularly glum, I even listened to a Top 40 station's 100 Best Songs of the '90s, the musical equivalent of those plastic noodles that come in packing boxes.) The thrill of countdowns extends beyond pleasure in the sounds themselves. Suspense is hardly involved—after all, no one expects Rameau to pull ahead like a Derby long shot and nose out Beethoven. But the ascent from notch to notch seems to whet the edge of experience, and one can't but feel, if I may use Schopenhauer's term, that the Ultimate Secret Meaning hovers at number 1. Countdown euphoria anticipates revelation.

Nietzsche, who quoted Schopenhauer's music-related comments at great length in *The Birth of Tragedy*, suggested that this revelation would be the transcendence of the self. "Music alone allows us to understand the delight felt at the annihilation of the individual," he wrote, exercising his theory that music's "Dionysiac quintessence" lures us toward a kind of ecstasy and cosmic oneness.

CHRISTENDOM AWAKE

On Reenergizing the Church in Culture

AIDAN NICHOLS, O.P.



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Nietzsche would have liked my CD collection, I thought the other day, when I wandered into a stage extravaganza that might have been crafted specifically to give me my pop music fix. The ingenious interactive play *The Donkey Show: A Midsummer Night's Disco*, created and directed by Diane Paulus and Randy Weiner, retells Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through disco gems like "We Are Family." Helena (Jordin Ruderman) lip-syncs "Don't Leave Me This Way," as Demetrius (Emily Hellstrom) flees through the forest; Titania (Anna Wilson), clad in nothing but thigh-high patent leather boots and a bikini bottom, plus plastic butterflies perched on her breasts, croons "I Love the Nightlife" as male fairies, their bare torsos smeared with glitter, carry her around the theater—currently, New York's Club El Flamingo, set up as a real discotheque, complete with DJ and glittery disco balls. No distance separates the audience from the actors, who mill on the dance floor in the thick of the crowd.

Riding on the wave of '70s revivalism that has brought us Broadway's *Saturday Night Fever* and, on television, Fox's "That '70s Show," *The Donkey Show* has proved to be one of the year's theatrical sleepers, and for good reason. The show proffers witty equivalents to Shakespeare—a roller-skating Puck (Barry Brisco) doses Titania with a cocaine-infused concoction from a blender. More intriguingly, the play allows the audience to share the characters' experience, via the Dionysiac ecstasy of disco music. Just as Titania, Bottom, and the lovers journey through madness and disorder, losing their real selves and becoming one with Oberon's enchanted forest, so the audience, on entering the discotheque, is swept up in the erotic pulse of the music, which seems to represent a primal life force that dissolves individuality.

As Puck pretended to snort cocaine off my arm, I reflected that perhaps it is this Dionysiac quality of pop music that makes chores so easy. The driving beat, reminding one of the world's larger rhythms, makes the task at hand seem insignificant, and therefore easy. Whether or not that tile gets scrubbed, the music says, life goes on. And so, apparently, does disco. □

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The price was steep

Mandela
The Authorized Biography
Anthony Sampson
Alfred A. Knopf, $30, 672 pp.

Don Wycliff

No sane man gives up almost twenty-eight years of his life—vital years, prime years—except for some large, transcendent purpose. No sane man sacrifices the comforts of home and family except for some grand, majestic goal. No man endures what Nelson Mandela endured in the prisons of apartheid South Africa except for a noble, compelling ideal.

Mandela's ideal was a "nonracial democracy," with fairness and equality for all. He enunciated it most eloquently in 1963, at his trial (along with a host of other leaders and activists of the African National Congress) for treason against a state in which his only right as a black man was to do as he was told by whites.

"During my lifetime," Mandela said in his oft-quoted peroration, "I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

Fortunately for South Africa, fortunately for the world, he was not forced to die for his ideal. Unlike Moses and Martin Luther King, Jr., Mandela finally made it to the Promised Land with his people. Indeed, he led them in. But oh! What a price he had to pay!

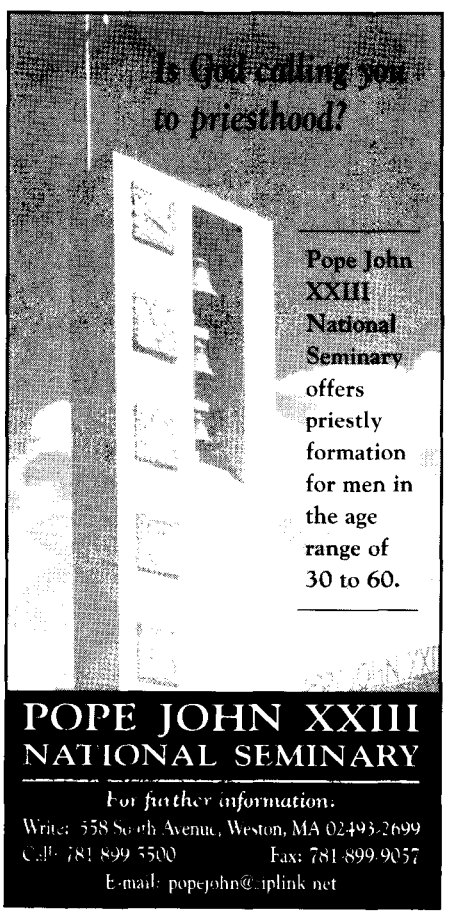
Anthony Sampson has done a real service with this authoritative biography of Mandela. It will fill a gap in popular knowledge of a man who has become one of the heroes of our time. And it no doubt will be a valuable resource for future biographers.

But it is, in many respects, an unsatisfying book. It is quite evident, for example, that Sampson is more journalist than biographer. The book provides an enormous amount of information about Mandela, about South Africa, about the black liberation struggle, and related people and events. So much information, in fact, that the answers to the most important questions—what does the subject believe in? what is the mainspring of his action? what transcendent purpose motivates his work and, in Mandela's case, his sacrifice?—are virtually buried under the mountain of relatively insignificant detail.

I yield to no one in my admiration for and curiosity about Nelson Mandela. But as I read this long, long book, I found myself wishing there were less of it. Much less. For less, I suspect, would ultimately have been more. Additionally—and this is another journalist's habit—there is a tendency to depict all of Mandela's thoughts and actions in terms of tactics and strategy. This is not unlike the current practice in American political coverage of focusing on the "horse race" aspects of an election campaign, to the exclusion of any serious coverage of the substance of candidates' speeches and ideas and programs. In Mandela's case, this approach tends to shrink a great man to a small one—or worse, to the stature of a common, scheming, ward-heeling pol.

Such reservations aside, Sampson, a Briton who first met Mandela in 1951, does a commendable job of tracing the course of Nelson Mandela's life, from his birth in 1918 in the Transkei region of South Africa to his retirement from the presidency in 1999, at the end of his first and only term.

Mandela was the son of a Xhosa chief, and thus a minor royal in his tribe. His was not a pampered upbringing, but he did grow up with a sense of entitlement and self-importance because of his family background. He began to lose those illusions at Clarkebury, the Methodist missionary school where he matriculat-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ed in 1934. "Mandela was expecting the other pupils to treat him with respect as a royal whose great-grandfather had founded the school," Sampson writes. "Instead he was mocked by one girl pupil for his country boy's accent, his slowness in class, and for walking in his brand-new boots 'like a horse in spurs.' He found himself in a community which respected merit and intelligence more than hereditary status."

In his youth and young adulthood, Sampson says, Mandela's aspirations were anything but grand and majestic. Quite the contrary. At Fort Hare, the black college he attended, "his immediate ambition was to be a court interpreter, a much-esteemed profession in the rural areas, which promised both influence and status....He saw a degree as his passport not to political leadership, but to a position in the community which would enable him to support his family."

The political bug did not bite Mandela until, still single, he moved to Johannesburg in 1941, and even then it didn't happen immediately. Mandela spent several years just finding his footing in the city, which included finding his vocation, the law. When Mandela did fall into politics, he fell hard—like a young lover smitten. His love was the African National Congress, the oldest (founded in 1912) and most enduring organization devoted to equality for blacks and the concept of a nonracial democracy. It endured largely because of the loyalty of Mandela and the colleagues—black, white, colored, Indian—who made common cause with him in prison, in exile, and in opposition within South Africa.

Of necessity, much of Sampson's book concerns Mandela's life in prison—his relationships with the prison authorities and with his warders, most of them uneducated Afrikaners whom he attempted to understand and "convert"; his rigorous self-discipline; his gradually evolved role as the acknowledged leader of the ANC and the liberation cause; and ultimately his negotiations with P.W. Botha and F.W. deKlerk for his own release and the legalization of the ANC and other proscribed political organizations.

"The prison years," Sampson writes, "are often portrayed as a long hiatus in the midst of Mandela's political career; but I see them as key to his development, transforming the headstrong activist into the reflective and self-disciplined world statesman." It is that statesman that we see on television nowadays and read about in the newspapers. But the price of that transformation was high, and not just for Mandela himself.

The most poignant and wrenching chapters of the book deal with his separation from his wife, Winnie, and his children, and the effect that separation had on all of them. Winnie, who was brutalized by the apartheid regime and became brutal in turn, might have become destructive in any case. But it is not unreasonable to think that the daily presence of Nelson might have attenuated her worst instincts.

Mandela the hero paid a terrible price for his triumph—and so, sadly, did his wife and family. If, in future years, anyone is tempted to say that the apartheid era was not all that bad (as some now say of slavery and the segregation era in the United States), let them read here what it did to Nelson Mandela's family. □

Don Wycliff *is editorial page editor of the* Chicago Tribune.

STILL FIGHTING THAT WAR

Peace Now!
American Society and the Ending of the Vietnam War
Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones
Yale University Press, $25, 291 pp.

Chris Appy

Many young Americans know about Donna Reed. They have seen her on "Nick at Nite" reruns, frozen in the early 1960s, a perfectly adorned, scrupulously tidy, and obligingly deferential suburban housewife. What do kids make of all those old family sitcoms like the "Donna Reed Show"? My children and former students are all far more savvy about TV than I ever was. They seem to realize, in ways I could never quite fathom, that the tube creates a make-believe world that screens out most reality and history. *The Truman Show*, a film about a man who unwittingly stars in a nonstop television drama, does not strike them as especially revelatory or troubling.

And yet, I do not believe young people, or any of us, really understand the degree and cost of our isolation from the unmediated world and its history, our emotional distance from the serial atrocities of the past century, a separation from reality that seems not to close, in spite of the Internet's ability to "link" us to every war zone on the planet. This gloomy rumination was inspired by a fact about Donna Reed that I learned from reading Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones's *Peace Now!*. In real life, it turns out, Reed was not simply an actress, a registered Republican, and a mother of four sons, but also, by 1968, cochair of "Another Mother for Peace." She was, in other words, one of millions of women and men who stood in defiant opposition to the American war in Vietnam, a war that killed 3 million people.

Many anonymous "Donna Reeds" were politicized in the 1960s, but there are remarkably few stories in our post-Vietnam popular culture to help us remember or interpret their extraordinary resistance to a war-making government. And the fragmentary images that occasionally float by often represent antiwar activists as self-absorbed, craven, or even treasonous.

Antiwar amnesia cannot be explained by the passage of time alone. After all, we've had thousands of books, novels, memoirs, and films about the Vietnam

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War, but only a relatively small portion have focused on the peace movement. The silencing of antiwar memory remains to be explained, but consider this: Wouldn't it be surprising, even shocking, if a major public figure were to stand before the American people and offer an impassioned tribute to the citizens who struggled to end the Vietnam War?

Peace Now! offers little to inspire such an homage. Jeffreys-Jones, a historian at the University of Edinburgh, sets out on a serious and worthy undertaking—to explore the impact of four key social groups on the shaping of U.S. war policy (students, African-Americans, women, and organized labor). Though sympathetic to the aims of antiwar activists who emerged from each of these groups, his assessment is equivocal and, in some places, muddled. He has done a prodigious amount of research and fills his pages with detail, but his arguments too often read like laundry lists of "factors" that do not awaken curiosity or clarify understanding. All of this makes a reasonably short book very slow going.

Jeffreys-Jones rightly indicates that widespread resistance to the Vietnam War took time to develop. Indeed, he claims, at the outset of U.S. intervention "there was a greater consensus in support of the Vietnam War than there had been for almost all other American wars." What Jeffreys-Jones fails to stress is that this "consensus" (acquiescence might be more accurate), rested on a long train of official lies and distortions about the history of the war, the nature of the "ally" we were supporting, and the views of the Vietnamese. Similarly, the war itself is given little attention as a major cause in eroding compliance and igniting protest. While he concedes that "the war was ghastly," the particular nature and conduct of the war are not central to this interpretation.

Workers, blacks, and women offered tacit support in the early years of the war, we are told, not so much because of the lies of their leaders, or their adherence to cold-war anticommunism, but because they hoped the government would reward their loyalty with federal assistance in their efforts to "climb the greasy pole of social advancement." Many workers had a vital economic interest in the so-called "Vietnam run"—the manufacture and shipment of vast quantities of weapons and supplies to the war zone. And many African-Americans, Jeffreys-Jones argues, were reluctant to criticize the war for fear of undermining President Lyndon Johnson's commitment to civil-rights legislation and the Great Society.

It soon became apparent, however, as Martin Luther King, Jr., put it in 1967, that the Great Society was being shot down on the battlefields of Vietnam. The White House could no longer depend on domestic policy to preserve support for the war. Though Washington did maintain considerable backing from union leaders, there were important exceptions. And the vast number of rank-and-file workers were never more hawkish than the larger society, less so according to some polls. It was their sons, after all, who did the bulk of the fighting and dying in a cause that seemed increasingly doomed.

Peace Now! devotes considerable attention to President Richard Nixon's efforts to cultivate a backlash against the antiwar movement by pandering to a "great, silent majority" of patriotic, law-abiding citizens. This subject is enormously important to any understanding of Nixon's political success and his prolongation of the war. Here, though, the argument is confusing. While in places Jeffreys-Jones credits the antiwar movement with shortening the war, elsewhere he seems to blame it for the conservative backlash that "more than counteracted the achievements of the peace crusaders."

Jeffreys-Jones deserves praise for documenting the diversity of the antiwar movement. While many surveys of the period focus exclusively on famous demonstrations and white male campus activists, this work amply demonstrates that all kinds of people opposed the war—not only radical students, but significant numbers of blue-collar workers, African-Americans, homemakers, clergy, businessmen, and Vietnam veterans.

The dense argumentation, however,

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will do more to stimulate academic debate than popular understanding. Those who seek more vivid treatments of the lived experience might read two recent anthologies, Mary Susannah Robbins's *Against the Vietnam War: Writings by Activists* (Syracuse, 1999) and George Mariscal's *Aztlan and Viet Nam: Chicano and Chicana Experiences of the War* (California, 1999). The latter includes many accounts of the 1970 Chicano Moratorium Against the War, in East Los Angeles—the largest antiwar demonstration ever held in a minority neighborhood. All three books are a sign that the antiwar movement may now be receiving the attention it has long been denied.□

Chris Appy, *author of* Working-Class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam, *is preparing an oral history of the Vietnam War era.*

NEEDED: FACT CHECKERS

Africana
The Encyclopedia of the African and African-American Experience
Edited by Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
Basic Civitas Books, $89.95, 2,095 pp.

Encarta Africana 2000
Edited by Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
Microsoft Corporation, $69.95, 2 CD-ROMs

Julia Vitullo-Martin

To settle a holiday dispute about the ethnicity of Saint Luke, we did what thousands of people in a hurry have done before us—we turned to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. But unlike most encyclopedia users, we did not haul down a thick volume from an upper shelf. Instead, we clicked onto the *Britannica* Web site and entered "St. Luke" into the "Find" slot. This instantly called up a typically elegant, traditional *Britannica* entry laying out the known facts about Luke and summarizing the various debates about his true identity and ideas.

The *Britannica* is the standard against which the new African encyclopedia, *Africana*, measures itself—in part because it was the standard set by the man who first dreamed of putting together such an encyclopedia, sociologist W. E. B. DuBois. As one of this country's most prominent black intellectuals, DuBois had tried unsuccessfully for some fifty-five years to publish a black equivalent of the *Britannica*.

Now it is here. Does it measure up to DuBois's aspirations?

Like *Britannica*, *Africana* can be read in a handsome printed edition or in a computerized edition. Nearly everyone who picks up the printed *Africana* will want to wish it well. Beautifully produced on good stock with lavish photographs and maps, *Africana* asks to be given the pride of place once given to the *Britannica* in middle-class living rooms. It seeks to become the primary reference on African or African-American matters.

Granting an encyclopedia such status requires trust: Trust by the reader that the encyclopedia is thorough, meticulous, well researched, and—since the editors must make innumerable judgments—fair. *Africana* does not yet meet these standards.

Take the entry on "The Black Church," an immensely important subject by anyone's criteria. It begins well enough, noting that the black church is a simplified way of referring to the more than sixty-five thousand Christian churches with a predominance of African-American members and black clerical leadership. After a brief discussion of Islamic and African religious influences, the entry turns to "White Protestantism and Slavery." Most readers will want to know here—and in all *Africana*'s religious discussions—how these devout Southern whites reconciled their beliefs with slavery. Yet instead of either good description or sensitive analysis, *Africana* offers a stunning characterization of white Protestants through the Second Awakening that ended in 1830. Despite converting many slaves, the entry asserts, "for most whites, Christianity was largely viewed as an instrument of social control, to produce 'obedient and docile' slaves."

Really? This is how most whites viewed their religion? What Gallup Poll showed this? Surely such a sentence demands a citation. Has some recent but still obscure scholar delved into nineteenth-century accounts and come to this startling conclusion? Not a word. This sentence and the hundreds of others like it reflect at best a sorry lack of editing. *Africana* apparently had no editor demanding "Source?" in the margins of submitted manuscripts.

Worse, such sentences reflect a lack of substantive—rather than mere procedural—interest in the subject. Thus the Methodist church, for example, is discussed in dozens of entries without any mention of its strong substantive attraction for slaves: Methodists believe in a direct relationship between the individual and God. No minister, no priest, no human authority intervenes. This is one reason Methodism rather than, say, Episcopalianism, became the dominant black church.

However, *Africana* reserves its most serious disdain for Catholicism. The entry on the Catholic church in Latin America and the Caribbean begins by saying that the "church's complicity in slavery, its Euro-centric cosmology, and its bouts of inquisitorial zeal have rendered it an uninviting space for Afro-Latin identity." Uninviting? Is the general impression of Latin America as primarily Catholic just wrong? Is it a remnant of an earlier ignorant age of favorable press for Catholics? What, then, are

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the numbers on this uninviting state? How many Afro-Latin Catholics? Protestants? Other? Not a word.

Instead, *Africana* warns in its conclusion that "Throughout the hemisphere Catholicism and its parent, the Catholic church, are held in fairly low regard by black movement activists committed to building a strong sense of Afro-Latin identity and antiracist sentiment." Few people pick up an encyclopedia to discover what activists think—especially unnamed, uncited activists. Most readers expect an encyclopedia to give the judgment of scholars—a group largely missing in action here.

Speaking of activists, where is liberation theology? Not in the Catholic section. Perhaps in the Protestant section? I find nothing, however, about liberation theology in the parallel entry on the Protestant church in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Still, I have a moment of hope that numbers at least will be forthcoming. Pentecostalism, *Africana* says, "is the fastest growing, most popular form of religiosity in Latin America and the Caribbean today, accounting for up to 85 percent of all Protestants." This is only partially helpful, of course, since there is no mention of what percentage of the population is Protestant. But wait. We are assured that Pentecostalism "has grown at breakneck speed since the 1950s, and now can boast more than 20 million faithful in Brazil and half a million in Jamaica." This sentence tells us nothing about the rate of increase—it gives no original base—nor does it provide national population figures from which to gauge the percentage of Pentecostals in either country. Without anchoring statistics, these numbers are meaningless. It may well be true—as the *New York Times* has reported repeatedly—that Protestantism is beating out Catholicism in Latin countries. But without numbers, *Africana*'s sloppy presentation shows only the writer's wishful thinking—wishful thinking that should have been queried by an attentive editor.

Perhaps these entries on religion reflect what the editors regard as a fulfillment of DuBois's intentions—the encyclopedia as bulwark, Enlightenment-style, against superstition, myth,

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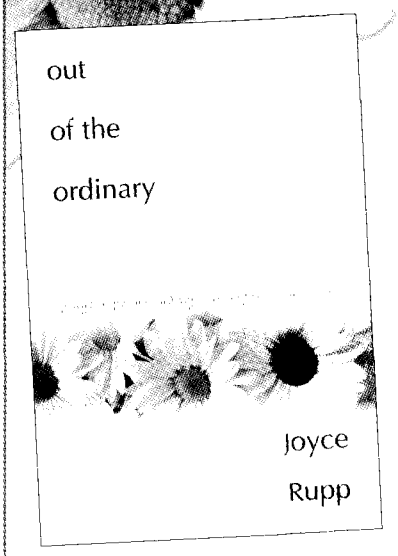

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and the false solace of religious faith. Fair enough. Then let's look at the entry for Judaism, a religion from whose secularized ranks came some of the most important activists in the American civil rights movement.

But there is no entry on Judaism or American Jews.

Time to try the *Encarta Africana*, the on-line version that will permit a search of the entire text. The *Encarta* yields surprises. It has an entry on liberation theology, written by Harvard professor Harvey Cox, who is listed nowhere in the print edition either as contributor or advisor. His is a tempered discussion, reminiscent of what one would expect in the *Britannica*. He begins by saying liberation theology is a "theological and religious movement that revolutionized the role of the church by advocating its alignment with the oppressed in society." He goes on to discuss its many influences—and its equivalent controversies.

And there is indeed an entry on Judaism, by writer Julius Lester, an African-American who converted to Judaism. This slightly bizarre, even mean-spirited entry, has only one sentence on the social relations between blacks and Jews: "During the first half of the twentieth century, African-Americans and Jews worked together to help create the civil rights movement."

Part of what one seeks from an encyclopedia are reliability and good judgment. Surely the thousands of Jewish activists who protested and litigated for decades deserve more than this lone sentence. But at least it is an entry.

The *Encarta* does not state that it will correct errors or omissions in the printed edition, but such is the promise of technology. The expensive, bulky book will not be revised for years. The CD-ROMs can be revised immediately and repeatedly. Herein lies hope. Even the *Britannica* required multiple editions before scholars pronounced it brilliant. □

Julia Vitullo-Martin *edited* Breaking Away: The Future of Cities *(Twentieth Century Fund Press).*

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CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

ry and science, but the bread of everyday life and the *sine qua non* of contemplation. And it is, I think, the reality of contemplation and beauty—the peace of the starry sky, the sweetness of the rose—that most tellingly reveals how finally incommensurate is the law of evolution, which does not transcend survival and self-interest, with the truth of the argument from design. In Karl Stern's wonderful *reductio*: "At a certain moment in time, the temperature of the Earth was such that it became favorable for the aggregation of carbon atoms and oxygen with the nitrogen-hydrogen combination, and that from random occurrences of large clusters molecules occurred which were most favorably structured for the coming about of life, and from that point it went on through vast stretches of time, until through processes of natural selection, a being finally occurred which is capable of choosing love over

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hate, of writing poetry like that of Dante, composing music like that of Mozart, and making drawings like those of Leonardo."

DENNIS FERRARA
Washington, D.C.

The author replies:

In *God after Darwin* I have argued that evolutionary science strains our classic theological frameworks beyond their capacity to express appropriately what God is, what we are, what nature is, and how the three are related. Dennis Ferrara's letter convinces me all the more of the need for such theological revision.

My critique of so-called "intelligent design theory," however, is directed less at Saint Thomas than at contemporary anti-Darwinians who arbitrarily abbreviate the honorable results of contemporary science in order to save the idea of a Creator whose main work is to establish and sustain "order." (Is it surprising that a certain political agenda often accompanies this editing process?) Associating God only with "frozen design" muffles the novelty in evolution, the ongoing entertainment of new possibilities that makes ours an inevitably unfinished universe.

Ferrara's second objection is that I fail to appreciate the evidence of "finished" design in nature. But in an unfinished universe, where all things are in some way interconnected, can anything ever seriously claim to be finished? I think contemporary cosmology, Darwinian biology, and sound theology all forbid our answering affirmatively. However, instead of causing us to withhold our religious admiration from the starry sky and the sweetness of a rose, an evolutionary perspective allows us to envisage such inevitably imperfect beauty as *promise*, as nature's openness to the coming of a God who makes all things new. As such, the glories of nature can be read as harbingers of a future still arriving. Such a perspective, admittedly more biblical than Greek, allows our aesthetic appreciation of nature to be transfigured less by nostalgia than by hope.

JOHN F. HAUGHT

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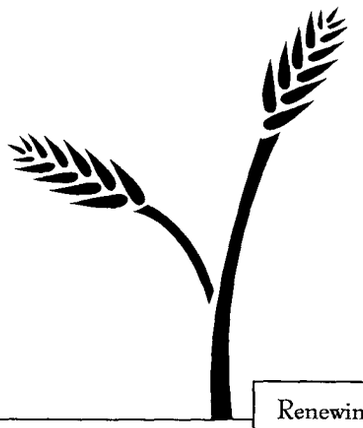

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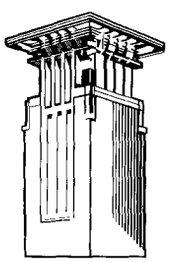

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MY BOSS IS A JEWISH CARPENTER

Michael O. Garvey

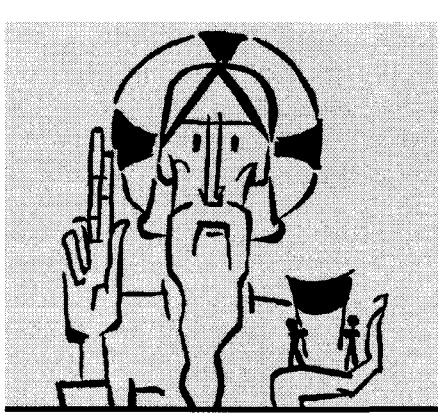
The *National Catholic Reporter* recently sponsored a nationwide religious art contest that awarded first prize to an image of an androgynous Jesus belonging to no particular race or ethnic background. A more inclusive figure may never have been imagined by (hu)mankind. Perhaps this "Jesus 2000" is indeed, as *NCR* editor Michael Farrell has suggested, a harbinger for Y2K Christendom of "what kind of divinity it will look up to as the next millennium unfolds." He/she is an abstract Jesus for an abstracted millennium.

Obedient children of the Enlightenment that most of us have been raised to be, we sometimes seem to mistake abstraction for reverence, preferring a deferentially metaphorical Jesus to a specific Jewish guy. It's disconcerting enough to speculate on what it means for a person to be fully human and fully divine without staking one's entire life and longing on the belief that there is one such person: a male native of Bethlehem, one, and only one, of the countless and mostly anonymous Judaean victims of the Roman occupation of Palestine two thousand years ago.

Not long ago at the University of Notre Dame's Snite Museum of Art, I walked into a gallery where an entire wall had been covered with 100 photographic prints for a traveling exhibition titled "Facing Death: Portraits from Cambodia's Killing Fields." The photographs had been taken to supplement dossiers compiled by the staff members of Prison S21, the former Tuol Sleng School in Phnom Penh, where at least twenty thousand men, women, and children were tortured and murdered during the Khmer Rouge reign of terror from 1975 to 1979. My friend, a curator at the museum, told me that soon a bench would be placed in front of the wall. But gaze after doomed gaze from these photographs—of a terrified and nearly weeping little boy, of a despairing grandmother, of an exhausted and apparently resigned teen-age girl, of a beatifically grinning and apparently retarded man—struck me with a force that made my knees weak, and I found myself thinking, "Why not a kneeler?"

My impulse was to make a sign of the cross, because to look into these shocked and hopeless faces—each with its own devastating particularity—was to meet the eyes of Christ crucified; to see the hand of an off-camera captor gripping the biceps of a collapsed young man was to feel the heft of the unanswerable accusation, first heard by Cain, "What have you done?" Nothing could be less abstract than these portraits of a hundred innocents who were sacrificed, along with at least 2 million others, to Pol Pot's highly abstract idol, a pre-industrial agrarian utopia. Nor could a divinity be less abstract than the one whose mercy they surely implored in those horrifying moments at Tuol Sleng, the divinity who seems, at least from this distance, to have been silent. The divinity whose silence we fearfully interrogate in our most desperate prayer.

The Jewish man who claims to be this excruciatingly silent God's only begotten son claims also to live within each of these doomed Asians, as well as within the distracted Caucasian man now writing these words, as well as within an African-American woman or Native American man who might be reading them. But to see Jesus as an average, even as *the* average, of humanity, is to disfigure him, and perhaps humanity as well.



Jesus is like us in all things but sin, which is to say, he likes or dislikes oranges, figs, and almonds. He is bored by some sorts of music and greatly delights in others. He has a deep and resonant or perhaps a high and nasal voice. He may or may not snore. It is impossible to get a fix on these and a million other things about him, but it is certain that among the ways he is like us is in our individuality. He is less like all of us than like each of us. To say that he lives in "the victims of Cambodia's killing fields" may be true, but it obscures the fact that he lives in each man, woman, little boy, and little girl who stared helplessly at a camera lens in a blood-washed room of the old Tuol Sleng School. He lives in Sork Huy and Ti Nen and Ang Sieu. He lives in this young bank clerk about to be executed for betraying Kampuchea and in the bank clerk's wife, whose screams he must hear as she is beaten to death in a nearby cell.

The "kind of divinity (we) will look up to as the next millennium unfolds," had better be the same kind Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob looked up to, the same kind that impregnated one young woman from Nazareth and sired one baby boy who grew up, made a name for himself in one troubled region, was arrested, tortured, murdered, and then astonished his best friends a few days later by sharing with them a lakeside breakfast of grilled fish. The kind Jesus calls Father. It had better be that kind of divinity. There is no other kind. □

Michael O. Garvey *is the author of* Finding Fault *(Thomas More Press).*

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